

# Introduction: Indigeneity and Latin American Anarchism

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Examples of indigenous/anarchist cross-fertilisation, so to speak, abound in Latin America, particularly in the case of Mexico, the site of the twentieth century's first social revolution. Devra Weber examined the alliance, which transcended the northern border, between Mexican *Magonistas* associated with the *Partido Liberal Mexicano* (PLM) and Purépecha/Tarascan, Yaqui and Mayo peoples. Mexicans, she wrote, were critical in forging the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), particularly in the Southwest of the United States. The PLM, which coordinated its activities from the US Midwest, in addition to indigeneity brought questions of gender and women's rights to the fore of the Mexican revolutionary struggle. According to Weber tactics of 'hiding and evasion' developed by indigenous communities in their long struggle against imperial and national conquest were reformulated and deployed by *Magonista* 'Wobblies' north of the border. She highlights the cases of figures such as Fernando Palomárez, a Yoeme, Spanish and English-Speaking Mayo Indian and critical architect of revolutionary organisation in northern Mexico, and Primo Tapia de la Cruz, 'a Purépecha *Magonista* Wobbly' who took time to 'carefully explain the precepts of anarcho-sindicalism and communism in the Purépecha language and within the context of a Purépecha worldview'. Tapia, a prominent activist for indigenous rights, learned English and migrated to Los Angeles in 1907, before returning to Michoacán where he organised a communist peasant union in 1921 and fell to assassination in 1926. '*Magonista* Wobblies', she concludes, 'provide a window into the diverse history of Mexicans who migrated to the United States and into the historical roots of many families and communities'.<sup>1</sup> The PLM's programme in 1906 demanded the restitution of '*ejidos*' (communal lands) and the 'education and dignification' of indigenous peoples. In its evolution from liberalism to anarchism, the movement substantially modified its programme on agrarian reform, and contributed, according to Rubén Trejo, to 'a Yaqui-*Magonista* insurreccional network' between 1910 and 1913. Deeply influenced by Emiliano Zapata's rebellion in Morelos, it

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advocated communal property, autonomy and mutual aid along the lines of anarchism.<sup>2</sup>

In South America, Raphael Barrett, a Spanish-born scientist who participated in an elaborate anarchist coordination of trade unionism and propaganda between Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Asunción in the early twentieth century, championed the cause of exploited Guaraní workers in the northern *yerbales* or *mate* plantations of the northern Chaco region bordering Argentina and Paraguay. Like other anarchists in Latin America, the most famous being Manuel González Prada in Peru, Barrett converted to anarchism from liberalism after witnessing the extreme injustice suffered by indigenous workers. In one of his essays, he denounced the 1907 Argentine labour code for its statement: 'The protection of indigenous races is inadmissible unless it ensures them a smooth extinction'.<sup>3</sup> He was a profoundly religious man, 'weary of positivist materialism and imbued with spiritual romanticism', an admirer of the altruism and rebelliousness of early Christian communities, and a fierce anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist who decried the 'civilizing mission' of Europeans, their churches and their states.<sup>4</sup> The most iconoclastic dimension of Barrett's anarchism, however, was his defence of the 'national genius', or of pride in cultural heritage, collective realisations and struggles for freedom, a consciousness devoid of nostalgia and prejudice that would facilitate the blending of foreigners into their host societies in the Americas. 'One can only know well what one loves', he wrote, suggesting that anarchists should embrace the cultural environment of the regions they hope to transform.<sup>5</sup> While it is undeniable that some European anarchists (and socialists), steeped in the positivism and evolutionism of their time, were less attuned to cultural specificities than Barrett, he was not alone. As far back as 1855, Belgian geographer Élisée Reclus, who advocated critically engaging local social and cultural particularities as a condition of creating a 'future collective history', had organised an anarchist commune in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta on the northern coast of Colombia, on land confiscated from *latifundistas*. Indigenous artisans and peasants worked alongside European and Asian immigrants in the experiment, which invited repression by liberal elites.<sup>6</sup>

In Reclus' era, the revolutionary idealism stirred by European revolutions in 1848, and their enthusiastic reception by artisan societies and workers, raised alarm among elites of the fledgling new Latin American republics and fuelled their discourses of 'civilization versus barbarism'. As Guy Thompson has shown, 'conservatives in Mexico and Brazil warned that democratization, federalism and decentralization', which were among the demands percolating in regional revolts and civil wars throughout the continent, 'would encourage Indian caste wars and

slave revolts leading to emancipation, which would threaten the post-colonial social edifice. Argentine liberals [...] doubted whether Spanish America was ready for democracy [...] Even progressive/radical liberals elsewhere on the continent, who were in search of popular support, did not include “the people” at this stage, either Indians or African slaves’.<sup>7</sup> This was a formative period in the emergence of anarchism in the so-called ‘old world’, a time when French theorist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, advocating the empowerment of people from below in the face of growing state-sponsored oppression, coined the expression ‘permanent revolution’ and developed the concept of federalism that would later inform anarchist organisational strategies in Latin America and elsewhere. The concept held that decentralised local groups and polities should associate freely and without state intervention, in the spirit of sovereignty, diversity, and cultural community open to dialogue with the outside, as an antidote to chauvinism and war.<sup>8</sup> It was after 1848 that Mikhail Bakunin began evoking the social and the national questions, which he regarded as vital to the struggle for liberation in mostly rural Russia, that would inform the early debates of the socialist movement in Europe.<sup>9</sup> Bakunin saw patriotism as a mystification by which governments sought to co-opt legitimate cultural affinities and ‘national’ aspirations. The principle upon which all socio-economic organisation should rest, he argued, was a decentralised federation of communes and collectively managed units of labour, which would give voice to such affinities of collective belonging by respecting their autonomy and empowering the people to define them.<sup>10</sup> Later Piotr Kropotkin would develop anti-colonial positions along the same lines,<sup>11</sup> and Errico Malatesta, a pivotal Italian figure in the organisation and diffusion of anarchism in the Americas, who also participated in conspiratorial movements in countries as varied as Egypt, Syria and Romania, upheld the defence of local popular cultures as a source of rebellion against imperialism.<sup>12</sup> The anarchist conception of social revolution was conceived as a powerful corrective to the predisposed continuity of imagined national pasts, as a weapon for social emancipation and resistance to nationalism as defined by the state.

Anarchists are often depicted as extraneous, cosmopolitan European immigrants without roots in the land, incapable of understanding the value of cultures, traditions and locally produced discourses of autonomy and difference. Argentine historian Juan Suriano, for example, wrote that anarchism in Buenos Aires was a ‘militancy of urgency’, a ‘Manichaean system of thought’ that held ‘national specificities’ in disdain, rejected the ‘native’, and failed to rally workers in significant numbers because of its elitist approach to popular culture.<sup>13</sup> Yet anarchist movements and societies in Latin America cultivated international

and trans-regional ties between localities, communities, and circles of workers, artisans and intellectuals in cities, who were constantly on the move, spreading their literature, manifestos, poems and plays to remote reaches of society. They generated a cooperative language of class as a counterpoint to racial and ethnic divisions, not a deterministic construction of universal belonging structured by unions, political parties or states, but rather a plebeian projection of self-determination based on a critique of oppression in all of its forms, and a promotion of solidarity as the paramount virtue of human existence. Their core influence was among artisans and urban labour movements, and many of their early activists were indeed of European origin. In Brazil, though, the experiences of the *Quilombos*, autonomous societies founded by fugitive slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, struggles for abolition in the nineteenth century, and the idealism of Antônio Conselheiro's rebellious *Canudos* community in the 1890s, fuelled the historical imagination of prominent anarchist writers of African descent, such as Fabio Luz and Afonso Henriques de Lima Barretto.<sup>14</sup> Especially in the wake of the Mexican and Russian revolutions, anarchist movements also developed an anti-imperialist critique of the nations in which they lived. Opposed to atavistic nationalism and racism, tired of being stigmatised as an 'exotic plant', the anarchist newspaper *A Plebe* proclaimed in 1920 that the only 'authentic' Brazilians were indigenous peoples. In an interesting preview of 'decolonial' discourses to come, it added: 'Our language is foreign. Our customs are foreign. Our religions are foreign. Our literature is foreign. Our sciences are foreign. Our arts are foreign. Our politics our foreign. Our republic and constitution are foreign. We even had a foreign empire [...] Many of the agricultural species from which we derive our food are foreign. The one and only thing that isn't foreign is the land of Brazil, [the riches of which] are exploited by foreigners'.<sup>15</sup> The article was in response to the manipulation of tensions between Italian and Portuguese immigrants and Afro-Brazilians in the labour movement, and to the incessant accusation by nationalists that anarchist 'agitators' were foreign 'undesirables' with no connection to the national community.

In settings where most anarchists were not foreigners, but native-born intellectuals, artisans and workers, such as the Andes and Amazonian regions, rural and indigenous communities featured more prominently in their platforms and writings. In 1904, Peruvian anarchist essayist Manuel González Prada published the classic text *Nuestros Indios*, a denunciation of ethnocentrism and racism that proposed a radical reorganisation of the agrarian economy along the lines of collectivism and mutual aid (the village based *ayllu*), which he believed would re-create what he viewed as the harmony of the Inca state of Tawantinsuyu. It was, much

like Kropotkin's embrace of the peasant *Mir* in Russia, an idealised vision of the pre-modern past and utopia for the socialist future, a myth designed to exalt the cultural heritage of a broken and divided nation, and to empower rural majorities against the oppression of a grafted modern state.<sup>16</sup> There are many examples of affinities between, and concrete engagement of Peruvian anarchists involved in urban and rural labour, as well as civic movements with indigenous ones. In 1915 Teodomiro A. Gutiérrez, leader of the separatist indigenous *Rumi Maqui* rebellion in Puno, had ties with anarchists in Lima and was close to anarcho-indigenist leader Francisco Chukiwanka Ayulo.<sup>17</sup> Peruvian anarchists participated between 1909 and 1916 in educational and legal campaigns of the *Asociación Pro-Indígena* founded by Pedro Zulén, his wife Dora Mayer, and lawyers, students and liberal activists, which offered indigenous peoples free legal defence, education and public support in national and international forms. Many of its regional delegates were anarchist militants with ties to organised labour in Cuzco and Puno (see Hirsch in this issue). According to Gerardo Leibner, Hipólito Salazar, one of the founders of the anarcho-syndicalist *Federación indígena obrera regional peruana* (FIORP) was the link between anarchist indigenism and the development by José Carlos Mariátegui, a figure of early Latin American communism, of his theses on the relevance of Inca communitarian organisation to the future of the Peruvian revolution.<sup>18</sup> In 1912, anarchist Manuel Caracciolo Lévano had called for a 'Peruvianization' of anarchist strategy, anticipating Mariátegui's use of the expression in reference to Marxism; and for the continental unity of '*Indoamérica*', well before Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, whose name is usually associated with the term, made it a rallying cry for his populist movement.<sup>19</sup>

Inviting renewed interest in the genealogies of socialist traditions in Latin America, particularly their anarcho-syndicalist roots in urban labour, artisan and rural peasant movements prior to the emergence of 'national-popular' states in the 1940s and 1950, serves another purpose. It will, we hope, contribute to a critical analysis of what happened when the participatory and emancipatory ideals of socialism, in all of its variants, were co-opted, transformed and domesticated by post-war governments. In recent memory, the anti-authoritarian critique of socialist projects has proven worthy of attention, in the spirit of keeping, when it comes to indigenous peoples, struggles for autonomy, agency and liberation on the horizon of 'left' discourse. Carlos Crespo speaks of a 'rebirth of anarchist organizations' in the wake of Bolivia's 'Water' and 'Gas Wars' at the turn of the present century; some anarchists, such as the youth organisation *Tinku juvenil*, supported aspects of the Morales experiment in Bolivia and others struggled to revive discussions of grass-roots autonomy within the state-run labour federation (*Central Obrera Boliviana*

– COB). However, the regime's treatment of the indigenous question was a source of serious contention.

During debates leading up to the 2009 constitution declaring Bolivia a plurinational, communitarian state, indigenous activists' proposals for self-determination were vetoed by the ruling party, and a much more limited, state-controlled version of 'autonomy' was promulgated.<sup>20</sup> In 2011, the *Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure* (TIPNIS), established in 1990 as a protected Amazonian forest zone curated by indigenous organisations, was the target of a project to build a highway between Villa Runari and San Ignacio de Moxos to expand oil production. A massive protest march to La Paz in response, led by indigenous activists and supported by anarchists, met with violent repression. The government then went on to defend environmental protection in Copenhagen in the name of the Aymara concept of '*Suma Qamaña*' or '*Vivir Bien*' ('Living Well'), for which Crespo contends that there is 'no empirical evidence'.<sup>21</sup> For the ruling *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS), the evocation of Andean cosmologies was essentially a tool of state control, and autonomist opposition to government-engineered extractive capitalism blamed on oligarchical white separatists from the wealthy agro-industrial province of Santa Cruz.<sup>22</sup> Nancy Postero writes that Bolivia's multiculturalism was 'more effective as a politics of recognition than as a politics of redistribution. It did not substantially alter the structural inequalities facing indigenous peoples. Rather, it was a top-down effort by the neoliberal state to incorporate indigenous peoples into the national project as responsible, docile neoliberal subjects'.<sup>23</sup>

There remains, then, the question of what happens when indigenous-driven movements, such as the ones that brought Morales to power, or the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) in contemporary Chiapas, are defined strictly by their ethnic components and enclosed in a discourse of culture, to the exclusion of their larger contributions to organisation, theory and epistemology. These often reflect powerfully transformative idioms, traditions and world-views expressed in local languages, which bear little resemblance to European anarchist discourse but commune with many of its concepts.<sup>24</sup> The Zapatistas express what Alex Khasnabish calls an 'insurgent imagination', 'anarchistic without being explicitly anarchist', that displays a deep commitment to horizontality, direct democracy, a logic of affinity, an abandonment of the fetishism of the state, and a fundamental belief in direct action'.<sup>25</sup> Anthropologist David Graeber called attention to the 'perverse and paternalistic logic' of Euro-American responses to the Zapatista rebellion, which viewed it as 'indigenous', and thus as a local, un-translatable phenomenon with exotic contours, rather than an emancipatory project with broader theoretical and practical implications:

Effectively, they were informed that, since they were Maya, they could not possibly have anything to say to the world about the processes through which identity is constructed; or about the nature of political possibilities. As Mayas, the only possible political statement they could make to non-Mayas would be about their Maya identity itself. They could assert the right to continue to be Mayan. They could demand recognition as Mayan. But for the Maya to say something to the world that was not simply a comment to their own Mayan-ness would be inconceivable.<sup>26</sup>

This raises the inevitable question of racism, which complicates the language we deploy to discuss indigeneity in the evaluation of discourses of radical social transformation such as anarchism. Achille Mbembe writes that historically, ‘race has always been a more or less coded way of dividing and organizing a multiplicity, of fixing and distributing it according to a hierarchy, of allocating it to more or less impermeable spaces according to a logic of enclosure’.<sup>27</sup> In this vein, Bolivian scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui challenges the racist underpinnings of ‘essentialist and Orientalist’ discourses of reified indigeneity that ‘imprison’ indigenous peoples in their ‘*culturas originarias*’, in ancestral and territorialised zones of authenticity. Rather than innate expressions of alterity which assert cultural immutability in their social practices, these communities perpetually transform and reinvent their past and present in resistance to colonialism, both absolutist and republican, and in response to the racialisation to which they are subjected, creating new forms of thought, new languages of affiliation and belonging, new practices of civic intervention.<sup>28</sup>

Was there an inherent Eurocentric bias in anarchist visions and practice that reinforced racism toward indigenous peoples in Latin America? The argument has frequently arisen in the work of historians and contemporary commentators engaged in broader controversies on the shortcomings of the European socialist tradition writ large.<sup>29</sup> George Ciccariello-Maher, for example, contends that their ‘privileging of rationalism’ in the tradition of the Enlightenment obscured questions of race in their writings.<sup>30</sup> Carlos Taibó posits that while anarchists supported the self-emancipation of indigenous peoples, they nonetheless displayed a pro-Western bias reflected in their conceptual embrace of modernity, and their reliance on a textual tradition of classics that ‘did not precisely facilitate their relationship with indigenous communities, which reveal themselves through oral tradition’.<sup>31</sup> Süreyya Evren, in his survey of the classical anarchist literature, called it generally ‘blind’ to non-Western traditions and deficient in its analysis of race and ethnicity.<sup>32</sup> Much of this literature overlooks documented affinities between

anarchists and indigenous peoples historically, their close collaboration and cross-fertilisation, and the attentiveness of anarchists in Latin America to their voices, agency, local conditions and cultures.

Writing on the Eastern Mediterranean, Ilham Khuri-Makdisi makes the point that ‘the history of radicalism is an intensely local story; it is first and foremost about people interpreting and giving meaning to vocabularies, concepts, and practices that had recently emerged on the local scene’. It is not a matter, she continues, ‘of importing but of adapting, and adaptations cannot take place outside of the local frameworks [...]’.<sup>33</sup> This is the perspective from which the history of how idioms of struggle and resistance travelled across continents should be conducted: cognizant of the development of these traditions in European contexts, but attentive to their transformation in new environments. Maia Ramnath advocates decolonising the concept of anarchism itself:

That means that instead of always trying to construct a strongly anarcho-centric cosmology – conceptually appropriating movements and voices from elsewhere in the world as part of ‘our’ tradition, and then measuring them against how much or little we think they resemble our notion of our own values – we could locate the Western anarchist tradition as one contextually specific manifestation among a larger – indeed global – tradition of antiauthoritarian, egalitarian thought/praxis, of a universal human urge [...] toward emancipation, which also occurs in many other forms in many other contexts. Something else is then the reference point for us, instead of us being the reference point for everything else. This is a deeply decolonizing move.<sup>34</sup>

It has been suggested that while the concept of indigeneity challenges logics of colonialism, self, nation-state and subjectivity, there is a tendency among ‘subaltern’ and ‘post-colonial’ theorists to focus on marginalised peoples’ ‘inability to speak’, rather on the inability of scholars to ‘hear them speak’.<sup>35</sup> Marisol de la Cadena argues that ‘the language of ethnicity was not the only one available to indigenous subject positions or to indigenous politics’, and that ‘these did not follow teleologies of any sort’.<sup>36</sup> In her study of Cuzco, Peru, for example, she demonstrated that working-class indigenous communities ascribed different meanings to the notion of *mestizo* (of mixed race or culture), some of them not incompatible with indigeneity itself.<sup>37</sup> Thus ‘*mestizo*’ anarchists, as they are often called, cannot be assumed to have been removed from their communities of cultural affinity by virtue of the fact that their surnames in the printed literature designate them as ‘mixed’ – as if this implied an inauthenticity or ‘otherness’, a detachment from an idealised community of origin.



Many of them in fact moved seamlessly between one 'world' and the other (see Hirsch, this issue). As the case of the Bolivian '*Ch'ixi*' clearly shows, identity and alterity are deployed in a myriad of original ways by the subjects of our inquiries on anarchism and indigeneity, and by contemporary scholars of their movements (see de Laforcade). In approaching both concepts, then, as historical expressions of collective resistance to hegemonic narratives of the state and of colonial temporalities, it is key to avoid assuming an essentialist understanding of their 'identities', which varied over time and place and meant different things in the various localities and regions where they encountered each other, sometimes producing convergences, sometimes eluding them.

The case can be made that while the historiography is in its early stages, anarchists in Latin America historically engaged the communities in which they immersed, in some localities more successfully than others. This issue of *Anarchist Studies* will show that Bolivia – largely ignored in the English-language literature on the subject – and Peru demonstrated early and ongoing efforts to approach indigeneity among Aymara and Quechua peoples in urban and rural settings (see de Laforcade and Hirsch). In Guatemala, however, which is at the heart of a vast regional geography of diverse Mayan peoples ranging from Honduras to Mexico, and in which the white and *mestizo* populations are a distinct minority, no such tradition emerged (see Lucas Monteflores). Raymond Craib has noted that in Chile, a country on the southern reaches of the Andes that produced a vibrant anarchist culture in the early twentieth century, the anarchist archives show virtually no connection between the labour movement and the southern Mapuche peoples of Araucania.<sup>38</sup> Beyond the simple question of whether anarchists acknowledged and engaged in solidarity with indigenous communities, however, there is the more sensitive question raised by Mexican sociologist Josué Sansón on the 'translatability' of anarchist ideas and practices among Peruvian rural communities, which he studied. Sansón argues that the transmission was not 'unidirectional', but rather a 'space of encounter in which some Aymara and Quechua communities received and appropriated them, reinterpreting and adapting them to their own idioms of resistance in the creation of their own autonomous movements'.<sup>39</sup>

The articles in this special issue frame the question of anarchism and indigeneity as historiography, but also as a commentary on the ways in which examining Latin American pasts can inform contemporary understandings of social movements in the region and beyond. In particular, our hope is that they will provoke further interest and research into how history reflects on the ongoing efforts by revolutionaries today, and by the diverse communities with which they engage, to

imagine a future devoid of authoritarian and instrumentalist discourses and practices that continue to reproduce the inequities of state power, capitalist oppression, and colonial domination.

## NOTES

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  14. Cf. Edgar Rodrigues, *Os libertários. Idéias e experiências anárquicas*, (Petropolis, Editora Vozes, 1987), pp85-101.
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